

**REMARKS**

Claims 1, 3-5, 7 and 8 are pending in the application and claims 4, 5 and 8 stand rejected.

**Allowable Subject Matter**

Applicants thank the Examiner for allowing claims 1 and 3 and indicating claim 7 would be allowed if rewritten into independent form.

**Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. § 112, Second Paragraph**

Claim 4 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite.

The Examiner indicates the difference between the pair of rails forming a patch and the preform feeder is unclear.

In response, Applicants submit the present amendment to claim 4 obviates this rejection.

**Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)**

Claims 4, 5 and 8 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Marchau et al. (WO 99/03667) in view of the APA and Swank et al. (US 6,183,691), Kuwata et al. (JP 06-171697) and Doudement et al. (5,186,307).

Claim 4 recites, *inter alia*, wherein the pair of rails is disposed between the spray means and the bodies of the preforms and wherein the pair of rails shields the preform bodies from the decontaminating liquid sprayed from the spray means.

In the rejection, the Examiner contends Marchau, the APA, Swank and Kuwata disclose most of the features recited in claim 4. However, the Examiner concedes that none of these references disclose a pair of rails. Doudement is applied as teaching this feature.

However, even if Doudement is applied as suggested, the suggested combination of references fails to disclose wherein the pair of rails shields the preform bodies from the decontaminating liquid sprayed from the spray means. Rather, Doudement merely discloses a

pair of rails without any other additional structure. In fact, Doudement's rails, as illustrated in FIG. 5, do not appear to be capable of providing any shielding at all.

Additionally, even if Doudement could be construed as disclosing the recited pair of rails, the applied combination of references fails to disclose that the pair of rails shields the preform bodies from the decontaminating liquid sprayed from the spray means.

Thus, Applicants submit claim 4 is allowable for at least this reason. Additionally, Applicants submit claims 5 and 8 are allowable, at least by virtue of their dependency.

**Conclusion**

In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of this application are now believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

The USPTO is directed and authorized to charge all required fees, except for the Issue Fee and the Publication Fee, to Deposit Account No. 19-4880. Please also credit any overpayments to said Deposit Account.

Respectfully submitted,

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